



DECADE: Greenspace in Scotland

The grass is always greener?

Over the past ten years, more and more communities in Scotland have come together to animate and revive the spaces 'in between' – greenspace.

One such place is Hayburn Play Park, Glasgow, where we held our DECADE event. It is being developed into an even greater asset for residents, providing a space for children, young people and adults to enjoy nature in the middle of a city.

But all greenspace projects are not the same. The jury's still out on the relationship between council governance and real community engagement – there are still too many examples where one part of a council supports a group while another barriers the way.

Groups need support to maximise their ideas, win funding and deliver projects. However, in the public sector, the support is diminishing and, in the third sector, staff often can't be retained by the projects once the initial capital grants run out. Inadequate revenue funding must be addressed if greenspace projects are to be sustained.

Consultation has to be meaningful, not tokenistic. It has to happen on site, with everyone (locals, professionals, politicians) who needs to be involved in the change process so consensus can be reached. And the conversations must continue as the project develops and is delivered.

Scotland's Greenspace Map is a helpful tool for decision-making, used to identify areas of greenspace deficit and oversupply. In areas short of greenspace,

elements of greenspace (at least) must be factored into redevelopment plans. In places with lots of poor quality and underused greenspace, it might make more sense to develop areas to take the pressure off greenbelt and rural land.

In Scotland, we remain risk averse and opportunities for natural play, using materials like sand and gravel, aren't forthcoming. Unlike our European neighbours, we don't seem to have the mechanisms in place to look after these features to ensure they're safe and well maintained. We need these.

Effective greenspace should be good for people and wildlife – it needs to be accessible, managed, connected and provide a variety of uses and species. Everyone in 'the greenspace movement' can work to raise expectations about the use, design, management and maintenance of parks and green areas.

We must be bold, state the benefits and win support.

Sue Evans, Board Member, A&DS

In this chapter:

A walk in the park
Russell McLarty and Julie Procter,
Greenspace Scotland

Participant feedback

A walk in the park

by Russell McLarty and Julie Procter, greenspace scotland

Greenspaces – whether parks, playing fields, allotments or a wee green corner at the end of the street – make a big difference to our lives. But is Scotland’s greenspace getting better or worse? With the current focus on community empowerment, how easy is it for communities and local groups to shape and manage their local spaces? On a beautiful late summer evening in September, around 50 people gathered in Hayburn Play Park in Glasgow’s West End to explore ‘Is the grass always greener?’

The Concrete Garden in Glasgow, the Play Association at Hayburn and the Friends of Dunfermline Public Park shared their grassroots experiences of developing community greenspace projects. We heard that developing a locally led project can be hugely challenging, bringing a great sense of achievement but also very real frustrations.

We explored how different people and agencies can contribute to, or hinder, locally led projects. The audience was encouraged to take on various voices and explore issues from different perspectives by wearing different hats – we had hats for the local activist, the designer, the local sceptic, the environmentalist and the housing association, while the politician stepped up onto a soapbox. It was noted that seeing things from a different perspective can generate new insights and potential solutions.

Some of the points raised during the discussion:

- Increasing pressures on public sector resources mean reduced support for local groups and real concerns about the future management and maintenance of spaces.

- While some communities have no shortage of ideas and ambitions, in other areas people may need to be inspired and supported to raise aspirations.
- Working with councils and public agencies can be very challenging, time-consuming and frustrating – while one department can be very supportive, another may raise barriers. Groups can feel overwhelmed by bureaucracy.
- Small changes can make a big difference – transforming a space that looks unloved and uncared for into a vibrant community asset.
- Events and activities don’t have to cost a lot, but can bring a park to life – encouraging more people to use and support it.

Key challenges and priorities for the future:

- How can councils and other public agencies work more effectively with local communities and support locally led projects?
- How do we create and manage greenspaces that are good for people and wildlife?
- How do we develop a measured approach to risk, particularly for natural play?
- How can we ‘green the grey’ – retrofitting greenspaces and green infrastructure (trees, pocket parks, rain gardens and ponds) into areas which are lacking in greenspace?
- How do we resource, maintain and manage our parks and greenspaces?

We know that greenspaces are at the heart of happy, healthy and strong communities. Extensive research sets out the benefits of greenspace for health and wellbeing, early years and lifelong learning, community cohesion, biodiversity and economic development. The importance of quality greenspace is embedded in a range of national policies. But in the most recent Scotland’s People and Nature Survey one-third of urban Scots said the quality of their local greenspace had deteriorated in the last five years.

Our collective challenge over the next ten years is to work together across disciplines and sectors, working with and supporting communities, to ensure that everyone living and working in Scotland experiences the benefits of good quality greenspace and green infrastructure.

About the authors:

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Feedback

A small selection of contributions from the event participants

“Parks are sometimes the only exposure young people get to nature.”

“Even if I don’t use the park, seeing it every day is good.”

“We need energetic driven people with vision, who are good at motivating and drawing others together!”

“We want to know more about successful ‘risky’ places in the UK.”

“My neighbours don’t care about our commonspace. How can I make a difference?”

“How can we help people (planners) think outside the box of what a park should be?”